

VZCZCXRO6195
OO RUEHRN
DE RUEHMR #0215/01 0951517
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O P 051517Z APR 07
FM AMEMBASSY MASERU
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2863
INFO RUEHDR/AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM PRIORITY 0022
RUEHSB/AMEMBASSY HARARE PRIORITY 0018
RUEHKI/AMEMBASSY KINSHASA PRIORITY 0008
RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY
RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA PRIORITY 0020
RUEHMR/AMEMBASSY MASERU 3216

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MASERU 000215

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 4/5/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [SA](#) [ZI](#) [CG](#) [LT](#)
SUBJECT: SADC EXTRAORDINARY SUMMIT READOUT BY MFA

REF: (A) MASERU 192 AND PREVIOUS (B) MASERU 191 AND PREVIOUS
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CLASSIFIED BY: JUNE CARTER PERRY, AMBASSADOR, EXEC, STATE.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

Summary

¶1. (C) Minister of Foreign Affairs Tsekoa invited the diplomatic corps for an April 4 briefing on the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Extraordinary Summit held in Tanzania March 29. The Minister opened the meeting with an overview of political developments in Lesotho and specifically pointed out how the U.S. Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) would assist the country in key sectors; the Irish AID was supporting education; and the Chinese government (PRC) was contributing through construction of a new Parliament. He emphasized the importance of these partners in Lesotho's political and economical maturization. Regarding the internal political status quo, Tsekoa stated that Prime Minister Mosisili had requested the SADC Summit to send a delegation to Lesotho in order to facilitate the dialogue between all relevant entities and stakeholders. Concerning the DRC, the Foreign Minister revealed that SADC was expected to intervene to assist in order to seek resolution of the conflict between rebel military forces and the government.

¶2. (C) According to the Foreign Minister, Zimbabwean President Mugabe wanted SADC to help present "the whole story" as he felt the United Kingdom and others were too harsh in their criticisms of the situation in his country. According to Tsekoa, it was agreed by the Summit attendees that President Mbeki of the Republic of South Africa should be the interlocutor/negotiator with Mugabe since he had previously tried to have talks with the Zimbabwe President. (Comment: The Republic of South Africa's new High Commissioner to Lesotho, Happy Mahlangu, had just told the Ambassador in a one-on-one conversation 20 minutes prior to the briefing, that Mbeki was perceived as "aloof" in both domestic and external situations. He seemed doubtful of how fruitful Mbeki's interventions would be. End Comment.) Finally, while the media was still present, Foreign Minister Tsekoa thanked all members of the diplomatic corps for their

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participation and promised that such briefings would be scheduled on a regular basis. There was not much additional information during the briefing that had not been contained in the SADC communique. End Summary.

Basotho History and Overview

13. (C) Foreign Minister Tsekoa opened his briefing by saying that he felt obligated to provide information on the SADC Summit to the diplomatic corps and, for a period of time, to the media.

He took special pains to recognize South Africa's new High Commissioner Mr. Mahlangu. Tsekoa presented a discourse on Lesotho and its important relationship with the development partners because it was not an island and, therefore, must have an ongoing dialogue with other countries. He believed such exchanges would nurture better relationships. He then focused on the government's goal and, in the process, referred to Finance Minister Thahane's March 30 budget address. He cited the development of an environment conducive to growth and development as essential, particularly since it would buttress the democratic gains made since independence 40 years ago. Within Lesotho's political history, he asserted that the country had faltered in 1970, had suffered throughout the military regime in 1986, but since 1993, the country had returned to democratic rule. He acknowledged that in 1998, unfortunately, the country had overcome violent conflict requiring the intervention of SADC military forces. Lesotho's decision to move to a Mixed Member Parliament (MMP) in conjunction with a first past-the-post electoral system, he considered a major step on the ladder toward a fully functioning democracy, despite the challenges that the MMP presented.

14. (C) Thirdly, Tsekoa focused on Lesotho's desire to graduate from the category of Least Developed Countries (LCDs). The nation and the government are presently overly-occupied with poverty reduction, including agricultural development, soil reclamation, and cessation of erosion, especially since the country had suffered hard from drought. The GOL must insure timely development, he said, in concert with major jobs creation and implementation of development programs. He used the MCA as an example of how this goal would be achieved and thanked the U.S. Ambassador and the U.S. Government for their deep involvement and sincere support for Lesotho's development. He identified areas in which the MCA would, once finalized, assist Lesotho: via the harvesting of Lesotho's white gold, i.e. water, strengthening the health infrastructure, wetlands

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protection, providing sector development and capacity building development in the business community, and the fight against HIV/AIDS.

15. (C) He then recognized the Irish Ambassador and thanked the Republic of Ireland for its support of education at the secondary and terciary levels. He included Japan, which does not have a resident mission in Lesotho, but covers it from Pretoria, for its role in building new schools across Lesotho. He gave a nod to South Africa and the joint bilateral cooperation they enjoyed along with the good bilateral relationship with India. Finally, he recognized the importance of overall infrastructural development in the areas of roads, water and construction, citing the new Parliament being built by the People's Republic of China (PRC). On the whole, all partnerships are moving from strength to strength in his view.

Internal Post Election Issues

16. (C) Turning to the February 2007 national elections, the Foreign Minister thanked the international community and the Ambassadors present for either supporting observers and/or trainers as well as serving as observers themselves. Most Basotho citizens believed the elections were free, fair and transparent; this had also been cited at the March 15 Opening of Parliament by his Majesty King Letsie III. Unlike previous years, this opening was marred by skirmishes even after the King approached and went through the Guard of Honor. Tsekoa obliquely blamed the oppositions, headed by the All Basotho

Convention (ABC) party leader Thomas Thabane, for the unprecedented noise that prevailed even through the national anthem, a situation Lesotho had never before experienced. He alluded to the statements on Parliamentary sit-ins and dissatisfaction that continued into the night, but did not go into detail since he observed that all present were aware of the situation. Tsekoa praised the budget speech of Finance Minister Thabane, which had laid out clearly the emphasis on Lesotho's national goals and next steps. Debates on the budget in Parliament would continue. Next would follow development of a specific strategic plan sector by sector. In concluding this portion of his address, Minister Tsekoa said when all is said and done, "it is in the hands of the Government of Lesotho and the people to exert leadership in uniting the nation." He called on the development partners to offer a helping hand in a timely manner to achieve all of the goals previously outlined. He then dismissed the press.

Action of the SADC Summit?

17. (C) With only the diplomatic corps and a few senior members of government present, the Foreign Minister said that the question of Zimbabwe had arisen during the SADC Ministerial Council here in Maseru. The Summit in Dar es Salaam, as indicated by the communique, was to address the issues of political situations in Lesotho, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zimbabwe. Concerning Lesotho in Dar es Salaam, Tsekoa continued, Prime Minister Mosisili was called upon to brief that body. The main points presented were that the election had been peaceful and had been deemed free, fair and transparent by the international observers. However, the Prime Minister elaborated on the fact that opposition parties had a number of administrative complaints, for example the alliance between the ruling Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) and the National Independent Party (NIP). The Prime Minister argued that explanation of the alliance had been generally presented by the Speaker of the House during the opening session of Parliament when she said to opposition leaders that she was bound by law to respect the list presented under the rubrics of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC). The opposition insisted that Mr. Anthony Manyeli, the deposed leader of the NIP, was invalid since his name did not appear on any electoral lists. Mr. Manyeli's case, according to the Prime Minister, had been appealed by his own party, which ruled in favor of the "new" NIP and its relationship with the LCD. The Prime Minister did say, according to Tsekoa, that the GOL will await the court decision since Mr. Manyeli had also entered a protest. Mosisili added that the opposition leaders had seen some of the SADC leaders as well as the SADC Executive Secretary and had knowledge of the procedures necessary to address any complaints they may have. Since the Council of Minister had deferred to the SADC Summit for action, there would be a three minister delegation that would travel to Lesotho for further discussion. The purpose of the trip is to listen to "grievances" of the opposition and to

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facilitate dialogue. The GOL is awaiting confirmation from SADC of the delegation's exact timing so the Government will be able to notify all parties, churches and other stakeholders. Tsekoa reported that the Prime Minister had told the Summit gathering that the GOL has nothing to hide and that the delegation will have access to any and all documents related to the February 16 elections.

18. (C) Tsekoa spoke briefly about the Summit consideration of the situation in the DRC. President Kabila had requested SADC to send a delegation to assist the DRC post elections. The emphasis, he said, was on handling the army assembled by opposition candidate Bemba, which will not integrate with government forces. Tsekoa mentioned the terrible violence that had occurred in the DRC and that the government there was eager to reabsorb any rebellious elements. Tsekoa described the Summit analysis of Zimbabwe as "a very uncomfortable issue which comes up every where;" the question is how to move Zimbabwe

forward. He reported that President Mugabe had called upon the Summit to present a clearer and more accurate picture of what he deemed the violence caused by the MDC movement (in other words, blame the victim). Mugabe reportedly said that his country is suffering economically and that sanctions are adversely affecting the population. Tsekoa, observed that there were three million Zimbabweans who sought sanctuary in South Africa, and other countries as well such as Botswana, Zambia and Mozambique. Mugabe's overall reaction was that the media had mistakenly portrayed him and his actions. Because the issue is so difficult, the SADC Summit named President Mbeki to facilitate dialogue in Zimbabwe. Attendees believed that Mbeki was able to handle the Mugabe problem because he was acceptable to all parties within SADC. SADC Ministers, according to Tsekoa, are very concerned about Zimbabwe because of its impact

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on the views of the United Kingdom and other countries and because of its potential to impact adversely on their relationships with the international community. Importantly, the Foreign Minister said that Mosisili had to push SADC to send a delegation as soon as possible; other members wanted SADC to wait until all court cases had been resolved. When Tsekoa asked if there were any questions about his presentation, we asked if there were other specifics of the delegation's trips that he could share with the assembled group. He responded that he did not have the timetable, but that the underlying purpose was to keep the dialogue going between the opposition leaders, other parties and the GOL. Tsekoa emphasized that Lesotho's desire was to find a way forward during the SADC phase and then to come up with concrete next steps. He added that the NIP's elderly President, Mr. Manyeli, had, before the election, stated his wishes to retire from the party, a fact which had not been revealed in public on previous occasions. The Irish Ambassador wanted to know if there had been "straight talk" with President Mugabe. The response was that there had been "protracted" talks, but that they were very frank.

¶9. (C) The Foreign Minister then adjourned the meeting after inviting the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, the Chinese Ambassador, to offer comments. The Dean thanked the Minister for the read-out and agreed that the diplomatic community would also find such regular meetings very useful.

Comment

¶10. (C) Comment: We concurred with the PRC representative's points that such meetings were important, especially if they can be held every month or so as promised. It appears that the opposition parties in Lesotho have accepted the fact that as long as SADC is somehow engaged, they will not try to promote further stay-aways or other direct action, and, in fact, have made a number of statements on the radio to that effect. It was difficult to discern from Tsekoa's comments on Zimbabwe how strong, or weak, the SADC's designated negotiator, President Mbeki, would be. There have been rumors that Mbeki, with the backing of the other SADC country leaders, would encourage Mugabe simply to step down, despite his declaration that he would run again. The bravado exhibited by Mugabe during his arrival and departure at the Summit, has been viewed here as a face saving gesture. We would characterize the mood expressed as cautiously optimistic and hardening against Mugabe, not only by Lesotho as Chair of SADC, but by the entire region. Post will provide details of the delegation talks in Lesotho as soon as the schedule becomes firm. End Comment.

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